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TAGS: PREL PGOV HA

SUBJECT: HAITIAN ELECTIONS: UPDATE ON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

REF: PORT-AU-PRINCE 404

¶11. (SBU) Summary: With the publication of the electoral law, the campaign season has unofficially begun in Haiti. There have been a handful of presidential candidacy announcements, most notably that of KID's Evans Paul. We expect several more over the next few months. By June and July, most candidates will have either run out of money or faced the reality that their candidacy is too weak to have a chance. We may see a last minute candidate, which is how former priest Jean Bertrand Aristide ran in 1990, and eventually won. End Summary.

The Major Players

¶12. (U) One of Haiti's larger parties, United Democratic Convention (KID, Konvansyon Inite Demokratik) held its second national convention Sunday, March 20 in Port-au-Prince. Approximately 4,000 people attended (including Interim Prime Minister Latorue) and heard former Port-au-Prince mayor Evans Paul accept his party's nomination as candidate for President. Paul spoke of the party's readiness to join several parties in an alliance (septel) including MRN, Reponse, Tet Anseme and Popular Party to Renew Haiti/Generation 2004. (Note: While KID enjoys strong support in the capital, its presence in the rural areas would benefit from an alliance. End Note.)

¶13. (SBU) Perennial presidential candidate professor Leslie Manigat was the first to formally announce his candidacy at a February 7 press conference hosted at the offices of the European Union. Manigat is the leader of the Assembly of Progressive National Democrats (RDPN) and was constitutional president during February-June 1988 (when Interim Prime Minister Latorue was Foreign Minister). He said he would maintain a low profile "so as not to attract too much debate." Manigat was presumably referring to his chairmanship of the National Commission Celebrating the Bicentennial, which has traveled throughout the country holding seminars and events in Haitian history and independence. Rivals have charged that Manigat is campaigning at the expense of the Haitian taxpayer and point to Prime Minister Latorue's ties to his former boss.

¶14. (SBU) We expect Serge Gilles to publicly announce his candidacy as the Social Democrats presidential candidate during the party's April 15 national convention. We have heard there may be some within the fusion parties (PANPRA, KONAKOM and Ayiti Kapab) who would challenge his candidacy, but most of the parties' leaders have confided to us that Gilles would be the candidate.

¶15. (SBU) The other major parties that have not decided on a presidential candidate are OPL (Struggling People's Organization) and Fanmi Lavalas. Within OPL, there appears to be jockeying between the Executive Committee's Secretary General (and former senator) Edgard Leblanc, Jr., and Spokesperson (and former senator) Paul Denis to be the party's pick. Former Prime Minister Rosny Smarth is the party's national coordinator for training and could also be a viable candidate due to his national name recognition.

¶16. (SBU) Fanmi Lavalas is still trying to find its way out from under Aristide's shadow and while some moderates have told us they will participate in the elections, it is unclear who would represent Lavalas as a presidential candidate. There are other well-known leaders, including GREH's Himmller Rebu (who has long supported the reconstitution of the army), GFCD's Hubert DeRonceray (who ran unsuccessfully in 1990) and MODEREH's Prince Sonson who could announce candidacies for president if their respective parties do not pursue political alliance.

The Longshots & Unknowns

¶17. (SBU) There have been a handful of other presidential candidacy announcements, albeit without as much fanfare as the major candidates. Chevannes Jeune-Jean of the National Union of Christians for the Reconstruction of Haiti (UNCRH)

is a pastor and prominent evangelical leader. The UNCRH recently announced an alliance with MOCHRENA, the Protestant party led by Luc Mésadieu that has a large following in the south. It remains to be seen which leader will emerge as the alliance's presidential candidate, but both harbor those ambitions.

18. (SBU) Samir Mourra of the Mobilization for Haiti (MPH) has already held rallies in Gonaïves and Cap-Haïtien touting his candidacy. He formed the party in November 2004, but has told us he has had problems registering it with the Ministry of Justice. Mourra is the ex-brother-in-law to former Haitian dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. The 49-year old American citizen faces an uphill battle to even get his name on the ballot since the Haitian constitution does not recognize dual-citizenship, nor allow a non-Haitian to run for president.

19. (SBU) Paul Arcelin of CRIH publicly announced his candidacy for the presidency earlier this month. Arcelin was the Haitian Ambassador (under Prosper Avril) to the Dominican Republic while his brother Yves was the Haitian Ambassador to Canada. Since 2003, Arcelin has been the Democratic Convergence's spokesperson in Santo Domingo and last year described himself as the political lieutenant to FRN's Guy Phillippe.

10. (U) Dr. Gregoire Eugene, Jr. heads the Social Christian Party of Haiti (PSCH), founded in 1979 by his father. Eugene is a 51-year old medical doctor based in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

11. (U) Level Francois is the leader of the National Committee for the Development of Haiti (KNDA). He was educated in the U.S. and runs a micro-financial lending institution.

12. (U) Dominique Joseph is the presidential candidate of the Committee for Reconciliation and National Union (KRUNA). Joseph is the director of OCODE, a developmental NGO. OCODE has prominent signs throughout the capital with motivational phrases such as "Working Together Leads to Development".

Comment

13. (SBU) We expect several more announcements of candidacies over the next few months. Most will announce their candidacies publicly following the respective party national conferences taking place in April and May. All candidates must formally register in August. As the campaign gets into full swing in June and July, many candidates will have either run out of money or face the reality that their candidacy is too weak to have a chance. What we could also see is the last minute candidate, in the manner that former priest Jean Bertrand Aristide ran, and eventually won, in 1990. If Fanmi Lavalas decides to field a candidate we expect they will pursue this strategy again. End comment.

FOLEY